

Sunday 9 August 2020

Call to worship: Praise the Lord, the one who sets us free, the one who gives us happiness, the one who forgives our sins, the one who died for us, the one who created everything. Thank you, Jesus, for your greatness! Amen.

(written by Paul Jason, pupil at Wellfield Methodist Anglican Primary School, Burnley)

Song: Our God is a great big God

Story: Straight after feeding the crowd with the fish and bread, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake. He sent the crowds home. When everyone had left, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. He stayed there on his own until evening.

Meanwhile, the boat that the disciples were in was caught in a storm – battered by the waves, buffeted by the wind, far from the shore. The sail was no use and it was very difficult to row. It was dark and impossible to see the land. Early the next morning Jesus came walking towards them on the water. When the disciples saw him, they were absolutely terrified! They shouted out in fear ‘It’s a ghost!’ But immediately Jesus called to them ‘Don’t be afraid, it’s me!’

Peter called out in reply, ‘Lord if it’s really you then tell me to come to meet you on the water.’ ‘Come’, Jesus replied. So, Peter climbed out of the boat and began to walk across the water to Jesus. It was fantastic, but then Peter looked down at his feet and got frightened, starting to sink he called ‘Lord, save me!’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him. ‘Why didn’t you trust me?’ he asked Peter.

When they got back into the boat and sat down the wind died down and the waves became calm. This made everyone in the boat worship Jesus, saying ‘yes, you really are God’s son.’

Let us pray: Jesus we can read lots of stories about you, how you calmed the storm, how you fed crowds on the hillside, how you healed people who were sick. These stories make us say, like the disciples did ‘yes, you really are God’s son’. It is wonderful to remember that you are God’s son, but you are also our friend. You called God ‘father, daddy’. You are someone who is always there, reminding us how great you are, showing us beautiful things in the world, loving us. But sometimes we forget about you, we might say things that upset our friends. Sorry Jesus, help us to be loving as you are loving. Help us to always be your friend. Amen.

Song: Abba, Father

Bible reading: 1 Kings 19: 9-18

Talk

I’m sure you’ve heard sayings like ‘Work fascinates me, I can sit and look at it for hours’, or ‘Silence is golden’, or ‘a picture says a thousand words, or how about ‘it is better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt’!!!

You might say that silence is like marmite, you either love it or you hate it. If you are an introvert, the chances are that silence sustains you, you need time apart to recover from being surrounded by people. You are perhaps a better listener than a talker and prefer one to one than being in a crowd. On the other hand if you are an extrovert you might find silence intimidating and if the person you are talking to leaves silences it is irritating and you have to fill the gaps with anything that springs to mind.

Here in both these Bible passages God makes himself known in silence. It is when the wind has died down and the storm has passed as Jesus takes his seat in the boat that the disciples turn to worship saying ‘truly you are the Son of God’. It is as Elijah experiences not the wind or the fire but the silence, that he knows that God is truly God.

I’ve always loved this Old Testament passage. Elijah has been so mightily used by God as narrated in the previous chapter that you would think he was on such a high that nothing could ever bring him down

again. But he shows his utter humanness and vulnerability when, with Jezebel breathing out murderous threats against him, he turns and flees into the desert, convinced that he is the only one left in the nation who is faithful to the one true God.

In both these stories, it is in silence that we meet with God. At the beginning of our NT passage Jesus had gone away by himself to pray – silence. Later back in the boat with his disciples, wind and waves at peace – silence...they proclaim him Son of God. And in the OT Elijah on the mountain has a Godly encounter in silence.

‘Silence is God’s first language; everything else is a poor translation’ said Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk. There are many ways to experience prayer, but often we find silence the most difficult. We block out quiet with music or conversation and so rarely experience silence unless we actively seek it. Yet contemplatives down the ages have found silence a powerful way to come close to God.

Where do we meet with God? Do we allow ourselves to experience God in silence? Is it something we find easy or difficult? How can we offer people the opportunity of silence?

In the early days of lockdown I met one of our neighbours who pointed out the quiet and said he wished it was always like this – I think he was hoping for lockdown to be permanent! Of course that couldn’t be, but I must admit I loved the lack of traffic, the increased birdsong, no aircraft and no industrial noises round about. At that point though I think the increased anxiety was almost deafening. I am convinced however, that as God’s people we need to seek out God’s voice, whether in a silence or a shouting, in worship and in petition. Over the last few weeks the Circuit has been looking at where we go from here, to maintain a vibrant witness in our communities, so that the Gospel can be made known. If you haven’t had sight of the Vision document, please let me know and I’ll make sure you get a copy. Will you join with me in praying to God for direction as to how we as the Methodist people in this area can hear God’s voice and act in ways which enable people to become disciples?

God bless you

Prayers of intercession

We pray for those who find themselves tossed about by all that life throws at them, those who feel out of control and don’t know which way to turn. Particularly today we remember the people of Beirut where an explosion has wrecked to much of their city, causing loss of life, injury, homelessness and desperation. Lord in your mercy.

We pray for those who find themselves dejected and at a loss, especially those for whom a long-term illness or a new diagnosis is causing deep distress. Lord in your mercy.

We pray for those who find themselves searching for what they do not know, those who feel that there must be more to life than this. We rejoice as we hear that so many more people than ‘usual’ have been searching church websites and looking at on line worship and pray that in their investigations they will meet with Jesus Christ. Lord in your mercy.

We pray for confused disciples and perplexed prophets, those who strive to be faithful and serve you, only to be surprised by grace, even us Lord. Lord in your mercy.

The Lord’s Prayer

Hymn: Dear Lord and Father of mankind

Blessing

Comfort us Lord, with the awareness of your presence in the beginnings of new opportunities; with the awareness of your presence in the heights of mountainous experiences; with the awareness of your presence in the middle of the crisis; with the awareness of your presence in the bleakness of the darkest night; with the awareness of your presence in the ordinariness of the everyday. Comfort us Lord. Amen. (Frances Ballantyne, presbyter, South Holland Circuit)